

Shaku Ju Therapy – A Further Development in Japanese Acupuncture

By Kenneth Glowacki, L.Ac.

Foundational Concepts

When you ask Dr. Kobayashi what is most important in his Shaku Ju Therapy, he will respond that it is the foundational concepts. Dr. Shoji Kobayashi has been practicing Shaku Ju Therapy for well over 28 years. He maintains a busy acupuncture clinic in a suburb of Tokyo, Japan and teaches his method both in Japan and now in the United States. Shaku Ju Therapy is based on the concepts of Qi and the interaction of Yin and Yang. He is well versed in the I Ching and its applications as well. When you watch Dr. Kobayashi work on his patients, you can see his rhythm as he uses Shaku Ju Therapy as a meditation. The results speak for themselves as his patients can testify over the years.



Dr. Kobayashi's needle technique

The first foundational theory in Shaku Ju Therapy is that everything in the world is made up of Qi. We can observe the different phenomena that manifests throughout life. Qi manifests first in duality. The Tai Ji symbol reflects this. It holds that there is both a Yin and a Yang phase (figure 1). Just as there are two sides to the radial pulse, stimulating the point, Lu 9, will affect not only all of the yin meridians of the body but also the yang meridians as well. Through this connection, we can see that the whole body is seen as a manifestation of Qi.



Figure 1

We can see how Qi differentiates further into various states. First, there is what is observable in the world. In the human body, this is “ketsu” which means blood or deep Qi and is more substantial and solid. There is also invisible Qi which is more superficial and can be compared to vapor. Dr. Kobayashi asked me a question in Tokyo recently. He asked whether God was more Yin or Yang. I was looking for a more complicated answer and stated that I did not know. He responded that God was Yin. You can’t see God (or gods as there are many in the Shinto religion), but the manifestation is still there. In a similar way, the body is made up of Qi, different only in density from bones, blood, vessels, nerves, muscles and skin.

So, what is it that produces illness? From the time we are born, our life force, our essence, declines. This is our essential Qi. Our body temperature generally stays at 96.5°F. When we die, our body becomes cold. We have used up our essential Qi. This is a normal physiological process. However, in illness the body becomes colder at a faster rate than normal. This is the central idea behind Shaku Ju Therapy. As the body loses its essential Qi (Table 1), it becomes colder due to lack of the warming, moving, nourishing quality of Qi. It shows up throughout the body and manifests on the abdomen in very predictable patterns as Shaku, “accumulations,” and Ju, “gatherings.” It is the goal of Shaku Ju Therapy to warm up the body and help the person make better use of their essential Qi.

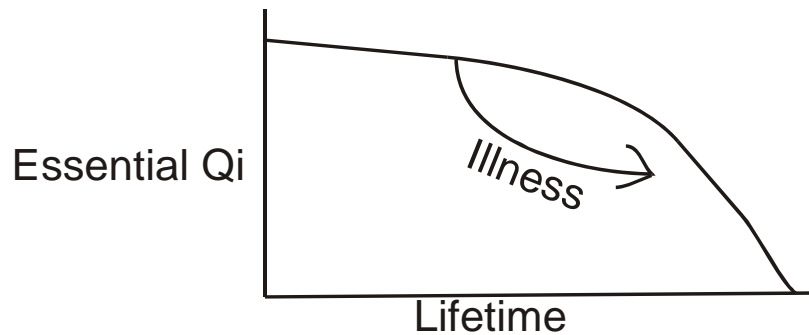


Table 1

The Process of Shaku Ju Therapy

After performing the initial observation and taking down the patient’s primary health complaint, Dr. Kobayashi begins by palpating. He takes the pulse to check for initial imbalances. He then palpates the abdomen to check for superficial stagnation. This is the first layer of stagnation called Ju and can be considered shallow Qi stagnation that is easily changed and more temporary. Dr. Kobayashi then finds reference points around the medial side of the knee. This gives more information about the stagnation of Qi and blood in the body.



Dr. Kobayashi palpating the abdomen

Through contact needle technique, sesshoku-shin, Dr. Kobayashi releases this initial layer of stagnation. Here he will use both hands to manipulate the needle to release stagnation. These hand positions are called the oshide or left hand position and the sashide or right hand position. According to the Nan Jing, those who know how to perform acupuncture use their left hand where they can palpate, find the live point, tsubo, and guide the needle to the skin manipulating the Qi at that point. The point is then closed in order to tonify. The skin is generally not penetrated. Only if the body accepts the needle will it enter through the skin. For this reason, Dr. Kobayashi uses a silver needle to promote the best conduction of Qi. Some other therapists use teishin needles which are like blunt prods. The therapist's consciousness takes on a more important role in moving Qi.

Throughout Shaku Ju Therapy, the therapist's consciousness is an important aspect in understanding how this treatment works. During each step, the therapist stands or sits in a relaxed, comfortable and open position. It is as if the therapist can imagine and see the needle piercing deeply through the body to the other side. This greatly increases the effectiveness of the needling. Personally, I can attest to this that I find greater results the more I am present and focus my mind deeper beyond the surface of the skin.

After the initial contact needling on the abdomen, Dr. Kobayashi rechecks the pulse for which imbalances remain. The points, PC 7 or LU 9, are used to rebalance the pulse. These points are referred to in the 69th Difficult Issue in the Nan Jing as having a balancing effect on the pulse. The arm which is less sore or tight when palpated at the area of the branchioradialis and level with LI 10 is chosen as the "healthy side" to needle.

At this point, the deeper level of stagnation on the abdomen becomes more apparent. Dr. Kobayashi palpates again for three types of stagnation: pain Shaku, hard

Shaku and moving Shaku. The location of Shaku will indicate the rest of the course of treatment. The diagnosis and treatment sequence are based on abdominal patterns. The abdominal map (figure 2) used comes directly from the Nan Jing and indicates where each of the elements lies. These elements correspond to their appropriate organs. Fire is paired with Heart, Metal with Lung, Earth with Spleen, Wood with Liver and Water with Kidney.

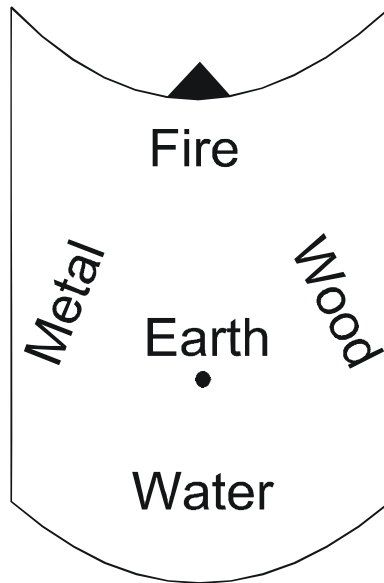


Figure 2

So, for example if the patient reports pain and tightness around the umbilicus, the diagnosis will be Spleen Shaku or Spleen deficiency pattern. With the diagnosis, the therapist can treat the Back Shu points and release the deeper Shaku remaining in the abdomen.

The patient is then instructed to lie face down. Some reference points of tenderness are found. These are on soles of the feet, popliteal fossa, buttocks, BL 52 area, lateral areas of the scapula and cervical vertebrae. Again, these reference points are used to determine the progress of the treatment. The therapist uses contact needling on the back along the spine to the outer BL meridian line. The point BL 52 is used to determine which side is the “health side” and the “unhealthy side.” The tighter and sorer side is considered as “unhealthy.” We only choose the opposite side or “health side” to needle. Proceeding from the diagnosis, the therapist begins by needling a sequence of elemental Back Shu points, Hua Tou Jia Ji points and Du Mai points (figure 3). Taking our previous example of Spleen deficiency, we begin by needling the live point at the level of the Fire element, at the Heart outer Back Shu point. The next point is found at the Earth level or at the area of the outer Back Shu point of Spleen. The Metal element is

skipped because we want to tonify and not sedate according to the principles of the generating cycle. The Water element and Wood element follow at the levels of the outer Back Shu points of Kidney and Liver. Dr. Kobayashi continues to needle at each point as long he gets results and the different reference points become less sore and loosen up. The consciousness aspect is just as important in this part of the treatment as the therapist facilitates the release of deep seated stagnation or Shaku.

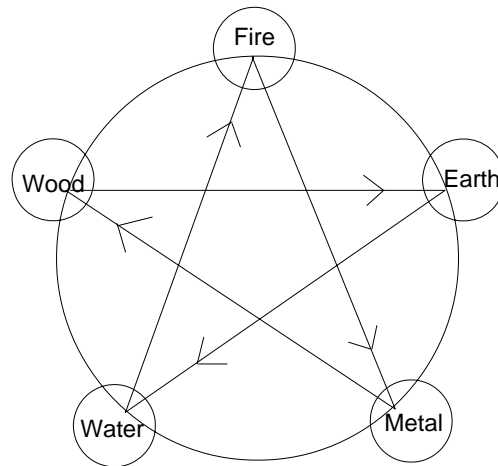


Figure 3

Once the sequence is complete and the reference points let up, the patient turns back over. The abdomen is repalpated. If any abdominal points used in the diagnosis remain, either source points or the 3 yin connecting point of the lower leg, SP 6, are used to release this stagnation. The patient sits up, and the therapist palpates the shoulders at GB 21 to check which side is tighter or sorer. The opposite side is chosen to needle to release this stagnation following the principle of only treating the “healthy side.”

Shaku Ju Therapy offers patients a way of accessing deeper levels of stagnation. It is both comfortable and meditative for both the therapist and patient. I have found personally that my patients have benefited greatly from this therapy. As a way of treating the root, various signs and symptoms diminish effectively, and the healing process is enhanced. I feel refreshed and more centered after these treatments. I can realize how I am a conduit for healing. I will continue to grow as I practice Shaku Ju Therapy.

Dr. Kobayashi Shoji is currently the president of the Shakuju-kai, the study group for Shaku Ju Therapy in Japan and in the United States. He works in his clinic, the Taishido Acupuncture Clinic, in a suburb of Tokyo. Dr. Kobayashi graduated from Sophia University in 1965 and from the Toyo College of Acupuncture in 1969. He completed the Physiotherapy Instructors Program at the Tokyo Education University in 1972. He also began teaching at the Kanto College of Acupuncture in 1976. Currently, he holds seminars on Shaku Ju Therapy in Japan and now in the United States. Soon, his

English text will be published by Paradigm Publications and available through Redwing Books. The book is entitled Acupuncture Core Therapy—Shakuju Chiryō and is written by Dan Kenner, Ph.D., L.Ac.



Dr. Kobayashi and Ken Glowacki at the Taishido Acupuncture Clinic